

Why remain Catholic? (with so much scandal)

*(Note: The text below has been transcribed from a YouTube video.)*

I wanted to speak to you again about this terrible crisis we're passing through in the church, this crisis of sexual abuse and the countenancing of it by some bishops. I know I spoke to you a couple of days ago. But what's been striking me recently is the number of people who seem to be calling for the abandonment of the church: "Because of this crisis, it's time for us to leave the church. We've simply had enough."

Now, can I just say this? I totally understand people's feelings. I share them — the feelings of anger and frustration. I get it. I get it. But can I also suggest, I think this is precisely the wrong strategy at this moment in the Church's life. *Leaving* is not what we ought to be doing. What we ought to be doing is *fighting*.

Let me explain that with a little historical reference. One of my great heroes is Abraham Lincoln. And Lincoln of course operated politically at one of the most convulsive times in our national history, when slavery was threatening the very foundations of American democracy. Lincoln knew from the beginning of his career that the nation, as he put it, couldn't survive half-slave and half-free. But he saw more profoundly too that slavery as an institution was repugnant to the very principles of American democracy.

Now, we can hear that in the Gettysburg Address. And in a way it's sad that that's become so cliché, that we all memorize it in high school. But let's go back to those words: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Notice he's articulating the principles that define American democracy: freedom and equality.

Then he says, “Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.” He knew what was at stake in the war was American democracy itself. He knew that slavery was a kind of cancer that would undermine American ideals.

Now, I suppose at the time an option would have been simply to give up on the American experiment. “I’m leaving the country. I’ve had it. This thing is a disaster. I’m giving up.” But Lincoln wouldn’t take that option. In fact, he led the country down the other path toward fighting — fighting for the ideals of American democracy.

Now, can I suggest everybody, I think something similar is at stake right now. The Catholic Church, its great principles and ideals; the Catholic Church, grounded in Jesus Christ, the love of God made manifest in him in his dying and his rising; the Catholic Church, in all of its power and beauty and perfection, is indeed threatened by this terrible scourge of sexual abuse. It is indeed a blight upon the church. It is appropriate that people feel anger, frustration.

I suppose the option is on the table: leave. “I’ve had it. The thing is just too corrupt. I’m out of here.” But see, I want to suggest everybody, that is not what is called for. Rather, what’s called for is the Lincoln option: fighting for the Church that we believe in so powerfully; seeing this blight, naming it clearly, unambiguously, but then fighting to set things right. It’s not the moment for cutting and running. It’s the moment for getting into the fight.

And you say, “Well okay, bishop, I get it. But how do I fight?” Look: You fight through your own righteous anger. You fight by writing a letter to your bishop, a letter to the pope. You fight by your very presence at Mass. You fight by keeping people’s feet to the fire. You fight by organizing your fellow Catholics. Fight any way you can. But you fight because you believe in the church; you love the church; and you realize that despite this terrible blight, it’s worth fighting for.

You know, keep in mind everybody, we are not Catholics because of the moral excellence of our leaders. I mean, God help us if we were. We want our leaders—indeed,

we expect our leaders — to be morally excellent. But we are not Catholics because of that moral excellence. We're Catholics because of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. We're Catholics because of the Trinitarian love of God. We're Catholics because of the Mystical Body of Christ. We're Catholics because of the sacraments. We're Catholics especially because of the Eucharist. We're Catholics because of the Blessed Mother. We're Catholics because of the saints. Even as leaders in the Church fail morally, the Catholic Church remains the Mystical Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ. And she's worth fighting for.

Keep this in mind too everybody: every baptized person is priest, prophet, and king. A couple of days ago I talked about the kingly office. Can I talk now about the prophetic office? When Israel got off the rails — read the Old Testament, it happened on a regular basis: this community was meant to reflect the will of God into the world, Israel the chosen people of God, but frequently its leaders failed, frequently its people fell into sin, frequently it fell away from the Torah and the temple — what did God do? He called forth prophets: people like Jeremiah, people like Isaiah, people like Amos and Ezekiel, people like Zechariah. And they raised their voices — sometimes, yes, in very angry protest — about these corruptions within Israel.

You're a prophet. Every one of you listening to me right now who is baptized into Jesus Christ is a prophet. Raise your voice! Prophets didn't cut and run when Israel was in trouble; the prophets spoke out. That's all of our responsibility, all of us who bear the prophetic charism.

You know, perhaps a last thought here. I said it a couple of days ago, I'll say it again. Whom are we fighting for? We're not fighting primarily to save our institutions. See, I'm with my old mentor Cardinal Francis George of happy memory. In the last talk he ever gave to all the priests of Chicago, he said, "Remember, at the beginning of the church, there were no parishes. There were no schools, hospitals, institutions. There were evangelists," he reminded us. "There were proclaimers of the word." But the point was the church does not depend ultimately on institutions. We're not fighting primarily for that aspect of the church's life. We are fighting for the victims of these terrible crimes.

We're fighting for people who were sexually assaulted, sexually abused. If we cut and run precisely at this challenging time, who will be the prophetic voice on behalf of these victims?

So that's my little *cri de coeur*, everybody — my cry from the heart. I get it. I get the frustration people feel. *I share it*. But this is not the moment to abandon the church. This is the moment to fight for the church.

May God bless you all.

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